

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 EC BRU 09425 271905Z

44

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AMEMBASSY LISBON

C O N F I D E N T I A L EC BRUSSELS 9425

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EEC, ECON, PO

SUBJECT: PORTUGAL'S INTEREST IN EARLY APPLICATION FOR EC
MEMBERSHIP

REF: (A) EC BRUSSELS 9235; (B) EC BRUSSELS 8848

1. AS REPORTED REF A, PORTUGUESE FOREIGN MINISTER FERREIRA REFUSED TO BE DRAWN OUT ON THE LIKELY TIMING OF PORTUGAL'S APPLICATION FOR EC MEMBERSHIP IN HIS CAREFULLY NUANCED REMARKS AT A BRUSSELS PRESS CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 20. HOWEVER, THERE SEEMS TO BE GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG EC COUNCIL, COMMISSION AND PERMREP SOURCES WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN THAT WHILE THE PORTUGUESE ARE BEING ADVISED TO GO SLOW IN PUTTING FORWARD AN APPLICATION FOR EC ACCESSION, PORTUGUESE PRIME MINISTER SOARES IS EAGER TO PRESS AHEAD. SOARES IS THOUGHT TO FEEL THAT AN EARLY FAVORABLE DECISION ON THE GOP'S APPLICATION WOULD HAVE A BENEFICIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND HELP STABILIZE POLITICAL SITUATION IN PORTUGAL. OUR SOURCES UNDERSTAND THAT SOARES WILL INTENSIFY HIS CONSULTATIONS IN EC CAPITALS IN OCTOBER-NOVEMBER.

2. IN GENERAL OUR SOURCES THINK IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO DETER A PORTUGUESE APPLICATION BEYOND EARLY 1977. THEY BELIEVE THAT
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PAGE 02 EC BRU 09425 271905Z

GIVEN THE GREEK PRECEDENT AND THE GENERAL SENTIMENT IN EC

MEMBER GOVERNMENTS FAVORING REASONABLE WESTERN EUROPEAN EFFORTS TO BUTTRESS PORTUGUESE DEMOCRACY, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR THE EC TO REFUSE PORTUGAL'S APPLICATION OUTRIGHT. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE MANY IMPLICATIONS SUCH AN APPLICATION WILL HAVE FOR FURTHER ENLARGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY (E.G., SPAIN AND POSSIBLY EVEN TURKEY) AND BECAUSE OF PORTUGAL'S PRESENT MODEST STAGE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUING UNCERTAINTIES ABOUT ITS POLITICAL FUTURE, THESE SOURCES HOPE THAT THE PORTUGUESE CAN BE PERSUADED TO ACCEPT FOR THE NEAR TERM SOME KIND OF "HALF-WAY" STAGE OF ASSOCIATION WITH THE COMMUNITY WHOSE PARAMETERS REMAIN AS YET UNCLEAR. SEVERAL PERMREP AND COMMISSION SOURCES SUGGEST THAT THE EC COULD RESPOND TO THE PORTUGUESE APPLICATION BY AGREEING TO ULTIMATE MEMBERSHIP "IN PRINCIPLE" AND THEN SPINNING OUT THE ACCESSION TALKS, WHILE PROVIDING PORTUGAL SUBSTANTIAL INTERIM PALLIATIVES IN THE FORM OF TRADE CONCESSIONS, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, AND POSSIBLY EVEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL CONSULTATIONS. HOWEVER, LIKE COMMISSION VICE PRESIDENT SOAMES IN HIS SEPTEMBER 10 CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR (REF B), COMMISSION AND PERM DEL OFFICIALS RECALL THAT FOR POLITICAL REASONS THE EC COUNCIL CAPITULATED RATHER QUICKLY TO GREEK DEMANDS FOR THE RAPID OPENING OF ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS, WITHOUT ADEQUATELY WEIGHING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THAT ACCESSION FOR ENLARGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY, AND SUGGEST THAT IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THE MEMBER STATES WILL DO THE SAME IN PORTUGAL'S CASE. THEY NOT THAT DESPITE THE PRESENT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES IN PORTUGAL, THE BROADER POLITICAL ARGUMENTS FOR BINDING PORTUGAL MORE FIRMLY TO THE WESTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES THROUGH ACCESSION ARE PROBABLY AS COMPELLING AS IN THE CASE OF GREECE. HINTON

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